

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION**

MID-PACIFIC REGION

**SOUTH-CENTRAL CALIFORNIA AREA OFFICE
FRESNO, CALIFORNIA**

Draft FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**STORAGE AND RETURN OF
CENTRAL VALLEY PROJECT WATER
WESTLANDS WATER DISTRICT IN SEMITROPIC WATER STORAGE DISTRICT**

**Central Valley Project
Sacramento, California**

FONSI-08-64

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In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval of the groundwater banking, and recovery of up to 50,000 acre-feet of Westland Water District's (WWD) Central Valley Project (CVP) 2008 water supply in Semitropic Water Storage District is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an environmental impact statement is not required. This Finding of No Significant Impact is supported by Reclamation's Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) Number EA-08-64, *Storage and Return of Central Valley Project Water from Westlands Water District in Semitropic Water Storage District*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND

On February 27, 2008, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) announced that the CVP allocation would be 45 percent for all agricultural water users south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Rivers Delta for Contract Year 2008. The 5-year historic average for CVP SOD agricultural water service contractors is 76 percent. Additionally, delivery limitations were put in place over the summer limiting the quantity of water available in June, July and August 2008. In response to this loss of water supply, many acres of fields in WWD were fallowed. These actions further reduced the water demand in the post summer time period (a period of normal decreased demand due to seasonal changes.) This will potentially result, counter intuitively, in WWD having more water in the remainder of 2008 Contract Year, despite the dryness of the year and the low allocation, than it needs to meet crop demands. There is also a potential that the winter will be wet which could also result in water supplies above crop demands. Proactively WWD would like to have the effects of banking water excess to their demands for future years so that the water needs in future dry years can be offset by banked supplies.

WWD desires to maximize the beneficial use of the 2008 allocation by storing supplies that are excess to its immediate demand. The purpose of the project is to allow WWD to bank current supplies for future delivery to meet crop demands during the next water supply shortage. Banking would maximize the beneficial use of WWD CVP supplies and improve their dry-year water supply reliability.

FINDINGS

Surface Water Resources: The Proposed Action improves WWD's water supply reliability and operational efficiency, especially during critically dry hydrologic years. The proposed delivery of CVP water to Semitropic and the subsequent banking and return via exchange to WWD would occur through existing SWP, CVP, Semitropic, and WWD facilities. WWD would not overburden other water resources to make this water available for banking. No new facilities would be needed as a result of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would not interfere with the normal operations of the SWP or CVP facilities, nor would it impede any SWP or CVP obligations to deliver water to other contractors or to local fish and wildlife habitat. Furthermore, the proposed

project would not alter the quantity or timing of diversions from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta. Neither WWD nor any CVP or SWP water user would be changing historic land and water management practices as a result of the Proposed Action. Therefore, the Proposed Action would cause no significant impacts to surface water resources.

Groundwater Resources: The Proposed Action would provide water to WWD in a dry or critically dry year, and therefore reduce the need to pump groundwater in order to supplement potential shortages. WWD would not be pumping groundwater to make the CVP water available for banking. The CVP supply WWD desires to bank is in excess of their immediate needs. In fact, with the availability of 20,000 AF of additional irrigation water in dry years, the Proposed Action would likely decrease reliance on groundwater pumping by landowners in WWD during dry years.

The delivery of up to 50,000 AF of CVP water to Semitropic for in-lieu recharge will help protect the local aquifer from overdraft in the interim period and the majority of the 10 percent loss would be permanently left within the groundwater basin. Therefore, the Proposed Action would cause no significant impacts to groundwater water resources.

Land Use: Neither WWD nor Semitropic is changing historic land and water management practices as a result of the Proposed Action. All water would move through existing facilities and be placed on established agricultural lands. None of the banked water would be used to place any untilled or new lands into production, or to convert undeveloped land to other uses. WWD would not promote additional land to be farmed. Any water that is delivered to WWD as a result of this project would be used on established agricultural lands to help offset the annual water supply shortage faced by WWD and hence, reduce the annual amount of groundwater pumped or reduce annual transfers from other sources. Therefore, the Proposed Action is not expected to cause significant environmental impacts.

Biological Resources: The water delivered to lands in WWD will be used to irrigate crops already in cultivation. No new facilities will be required to bring the water to these locations, and no native or untilled lands will be brought into production by the Proposed Action. Orchards provide some habitat for the San Joaquin kit fox, but the habitat value is relatively small, and would not be affected by the Proposed Action. Within WWD boundaries, there are a number of records shown by the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) for species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The Proposed Action would not change the availability or quality of any habitat for the California least tern, because no waterways or nesting areas will be created, destroyed or modified in any way.

There will be no effect on the listed salmonids and their critical habitat, on the delta smelt and its critical habitat or on the green sturgeon. The Proposed Action only addresses use and storage of water that is made available south of the Delta after it has been diverted from natural waterways and placed in man-made distribution systems (canals/reservoirs and groundwater banks). This Proposed Action has no effect on natural stream systems that comprise or contain salmonid critical habitat, nor on any stream systems that comprise the habitat of the green sturgeon. The Proposed Action will not affect the primary constituent elements of delta smelt critical habitat. As a result of the above factors, Reclamation has made a determination of no effect for this banking activity under the Endangered Species Act for all species expected to be within the action area.

Cultural Resources: The Proposed Action consists of the storage and return of CVP water through existing facilities. The CVP water would be conveyed in existing facilities and canals and would be directed to established agricultural land; no untilled land will be cultivated with this water. No ground disturbing activities, including excavation or construction are required to convey the water. This administrative action is not the type of activity that has the potential to affect historic properties pursuant to the regulations at 36 CFR Part 800.3(a)(1). As a result of this no potential to affect historic properties determination, no cultural resources will be impacted as a result of the Proposed Action.

Indian Trust Assets: There are no tribes possessing legal property interests held in trust by the United States in the water involved with this action, nor is there such a property interest in the lands designated to receive the water proposed in this action, therefore ITAs are not affected by this action.

Socioeconomic Resources: The return delivery of CVP water to WWD would provide water to the area in dry years and would help sustain existing croplands in WWD. Businesses rely on these crops to maintain jobs. The Proposed Action would not induce population growth within WWD, nor would seasonal labor requirements change. Agriculturally dependent businesses would not be affected by the Proposed Action. No adverse effects to public health and safety would occur. The Proposed Action would not have highly controversial or uncertain environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks. The Proposed Action would continue to support the economic vitality in the region. Semitropic and WWD are responsible for managing water for the benefit of agriculture, since they exist to support growers within their respective districts. Maximizing the use of operational exchanges is beneficial to local economic conditions and agricultural employment.

Environmental Justice: The Proposed Action would not cause dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease. The Proposed Action would not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. No impacts relevant to Environmental Justice are anticipated because the project does not include any construction or development of project facilities, or any change in operations that would affect the general public.

Cumulative Impacts: The Proposed Action will allow WWD to bank available CVP water for future delivery to meet crop demands during the next dry water year(s). This project will reduce WWD dependence upon groundwater resources during dry hydrologic years when the banked water is returned. Eventually, WWD anticipates entering into a long-term ongoing banking program with Semitropic in which they would be guaranteed 60,000 AF of storage capacity. This future action differs from the proposed action in that the proposed action is a one time banking project and concludes when the water has been returned. The future long-term agreement would make WWD a full banking partner in which the banking program would be ongoing, banking in wet years and withdrawing in dry years, and does not end once the banked water is withdrawn. The Proposed Action has no known adverse cumulative impacts on the environment when considered with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions. Approval would not have highly controversial or uncertain environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks. Approval of the project is not related to other actions with individually minor but cumulatively significant environmental effects.